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ABSTRACT

This article examines the relationship among 11 selected factors and reentry difficulty, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being of Taiwanese students returning home from the United States. The results of the questionnaire showed that returnees' reentry adjustment was affected by gender, willingness to return home, overall satisfaction with overseas experience, and perceived treatment by home people. At the same time, their adjustment process was also affected by factors such as parental expectation, career consideration, love for the home country, and lifestyle preferences. The paper states that these findings have significant implications, especially for multicultural counseling and counselor training. Counselors in the United States and Taiwan can provide students/returnees pre-departure and reentry orientation for both general and specific readjustment concerns. Some suggestions include reality check, helping re-familiarize returnees with social conditions in Taiwan, developing appropriate job search and interpersonal skills, and coping strategies. As for educators in the multicultural counseling profession, it is hoped that this paper will call attention to the inclusion of reentry adjustment in the entire cross-cultural adaptation process, and will prepare student counselors to provide services to clients regarding both their initial cross-cultural adaptation as well as their reentry transition. (Contains 14 references.) (JDM)

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Reentry Difficulty, Life Satisfaction and Psychological Well-Being of Taiwanese Students Who Have Returned from the United States

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Abstract. The purpose of this study was to examine relationships among 11 selected factors and reentry difficulty, life satisfaction, psychological well-being of Taiwanese student returnees from the United States. One hundred ninety-one returnees responded to the survey. Results showed that returnees' reentry adjustment were affected by gender, willingness to return home, overall satisfaction with overseas experience, and perceived treatment by home people. At the same time, their adjustment process was also affected by factors such as parental expectations, career considerations, love for the home country, and lifestyle preferences. Meanings of the study and its implications in multicultural counseling are discussed.

Introduction

For decades, intensive research efforts have been and continue to be concentrated on the cultural adaptation of sojourners to a foreign culture. Much less attention has been paid to cultural reentry-- the process of readjusting to one's home culture after an extended sojourn abroad (Austin, 1983, 1986; Martin, 1984). This lack of research interest in cultural reentry may stem from a widely taken perspective that reentry should not be problematic since it is "going home." Wallach and Metcalf (1993) argued that because of this misconception, cultural reentry has become a "hidden problem."

Studies have suggested that regardless of the nature of their sojourn (business or educational purposes, long term or short term), people often change when they move to a different country or culture (Anderson, 1994; Berry, 1990; Gama & Pedersen, 1977; Uehara, 1986a, 1986b). Their changes may be in various ways: physical appearances, values, perspectives, behaviors, lifestyle, and worldviews (Gama & Pedersen, 1977; Hansel, 1993; Kidder, 1992; Saeed, 1987). Given these changes, sojourners' reentry becomes very important not only to returned individuals but also their home countries or cultures. For returnees, the major task may be making a reentry adjustment; for their home countries, the challenge may be dealing with the impacts (political, social, economical, technical, educational, etc.) posed by the returnees. Among all types of returnees, international students and their reentry require particular attention.

The number of international students worldwide is too significant to ignore. According to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) data, more than one million (1,216,964) post-secondary students were studying in countries other than their own in 1990 (Zikopoulos, 1993). These students are "one of the most important elements of the international knowledge system and the embodiment of the cosmopolitan scientific culture" (Altbach, 1989, p.126) during their sojourn overseas. Their contribution to their home countries becomes immeasurable if they fully utilize their knowledge and skills upon returning home. To ensure a successful utilization of the knowledge, one of the critical elements is a smooth reentry process.

Existing studies indicate that reentry adjustment can be as difficult as, if not more

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difficult than, the initial adjustment to a foreign environment (Adler, 1981; Martin, 1984). Student returnees may be confronted with "reentry culture shock" (Adler, 1981) or problems such as role strain, identity and value conflicts, changes in lifestyle, lack of privacy, bureaucr leadership, interpersonal difficulty, jealousy on the part of colleagues, difficulty of finding a jo and inability to apply newly learned knowledge to one's profession in home countries. Some may have to deal with psychological distress such as frustration, anxiety, feelings of loss, disappointment, loneliness, regret, depression, and psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches, stomach problems, and insomnia (Bochner, Lin, & McLeod, 1980; Brabant, Palmer, & Gramling, 1990; Brislin & Van Buren IV, 1974; Gama & Pedersen, 1977; Hansel, 1993; Kidder, 1992; Martin, 1986a, 1986b; Saeed, 1987; Uehara, 1986a, 1986b). As such, identifying and examining factors that may affect returned students' reentry becomes very important. Unfortunately, research on this is limited. The relationship between potential factors and international students' reentry adjustment needs thorough investigation.

The purpose of this study was to increase understanding of the reentry experience of international students by exploring and identifying relationships among selected factors and reentry difficulty, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being of Taiwanese students who have returned home from their study in the United States. The selection of predicting factors was based on findings of previous reentry studies and suggestions given by scholars in cross-cultural research (Anderson, 1994; Martin, 1984). The selection of Taiwanese students from the United States as the population of interest was based on the fact that for decades the United States has hosted the largest number of international students, and that a significant number of Taiwanese students study in the United States and return home upon graduation (Davis, 1995; National Youth Commission of Taiwan, 1994). Using this returnee group as subjects can provide an adequate research sample size to enhance the understanding of reentry.

Method

The methodology of this study including participants, sampling procedure, relevant variables, instrumentation, data collection and analyses are as follows:

Participants and sampling procedure

To be included in this study, participants had to have attended an academic institution in the United States, had to have lived in the United States for at least one year, and had to have returned to Taiwan after their overseas study. The researcher located potential participants by accessing the Internet site of the National Youth Commission of the Taiwanese government. During January and February 1996, 427 Taiwanese students (207 male and 220 female) who had returned from the United States were located and invited through the mail and telephone calls to participate. As a result, 191 returnees (94 male, 97 female) participated in the study. The overall return rate was 44.7% (45.4% for males, 44.1% for females).

Relevant variables

Three dependent variables were examined in this study: (1) reentry difficulty– level of readjustment difficulty, (2) life satisfaction– overall satisfaction with life, and (3) psychological well-being– returnees' mental health, measured by levels of depression or the lack thereof. Eleven independent variables were selected for the study, including four background factors (gender, age, academic level, field of study), four overseas factors (time spent overseas, overall

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satisfaction with overseas experience, willingness to return home, reentry reasons), and three reentry factors (time since return, change of home society/environment, and perceived treatment by home people).

Instrumentation

The Reentry Difficulty Scale was developed by the researcher to measure returnees' reentry difficulty (coefficient alpha= .79). The scale's 16 statements describe potential problems that may be experienced by returnees upon their reentry, problems concerning physical health, career, self identity, family and interpersonal relationships. Participants were asked to agree or disagree with each statement using a 7-point Likert scale(1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree). The possible total score range is 16 to 112, with higher scores indicating higher levels of reentry difficulty, and lower scores indicating lower levels.

The Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) was used to assess returnees' levels of life satisfaction after their reentry (test-retest correlation coefficient= .82; coefficient alpha= .86 and .87). The scale consists of five general statements about life (e.g., "In most ways my life is close to my ideal." and "So far I have gotten the important things I want in life."). Participants also responded to each statement using a 7-point scale (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree). The possible score range is between 5 and 35, with higher scores indicating higher levels of life satisfaction, and lower scores indicating lower levels.

The Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977) was used to measure returnees' current level of depressive symptomatology. It is considered to have significant levels of reliability and validity (coefficient alpha= .86; test-retest correlation= between .32 and .67; concurrent validity= between .28 and .89 at $p < .01$ significant level). Participants were asked to respond to 20 statements such as "I felt I could not shake off the blues.", "I was happy.", and "People were unfriendly." Each response was scored from zero to three on a scale of frequency/duration of occurrence of the symptom (i.e., 1= rarely or none of the time, 2= some or a little of the time, 2= occasionally or a moderate amount of time, 3= most or all of the time). The possible ranges of scores are zero to 60, with higher scores indicating higher depression levels. Researchers have suggested 16 be used as a cutoff, 17 and over designate "possible" (depressive) cases, 23 and over indicate "probable" cases (Radloff, 1977; Radloff & Locke, 1986).

Another eleven questions were formed to obtain information of the independent variables. Questions were about gender, age, academic level, field of study, time spent overseas, overall satisfaction with overseas experience (1=very unsatisfactory, 5= very satisfactory), willingness to return home (whether or not returning home is returnees' first choice), reentry reasons (14 potential reasons affecting decisions of reentry; e.g., parents' expectations, little job opportunity in foreign countries, feeling isolated in the foreign country, etc.), time since return, change of home society/environment (1= no change at all, 5= complete change), and perceived treatment from home people (1= very poorly, 5= very well).

Data collection and data analyses

Data needed for this study were obtained through a mail survey. The major statistical techniques employed to analyze the data included multiple regressions, t-tests, and product-moment correlations. More specifically, relationships between ten independent variables (not including the factor "reentry reasons") and three dependent variables were tested using multiple

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regression analyses. Relationships among the independent variable "reentry reasons" and dependent variables were analyzed by t-tests. Relationships among dependent variables were examined using product-moment correlations. All analyses were accomplished using the SAS program. The significance level was set at $p < .05$.

Results

The following provides findings of the data analyses:

Descriptive information of the participants

Of the 191 (94 male, 97 female)Taiwanese returnees who responded to the survey, the majority (80%, N=151) were between the ages of 26 and 35. Twenty-two percent (N= 42) were doctoral graduates, and the remaining 78% included 148 master's graduates and one bachelor's graduate. Business, engineering, and education were the major fields of study by returnees. The average time returnees spent overseas was about 43 months, and the average time since their return was about 13 months. Approximately 70% of the returnees considered returning home after overseas study as their first choice. Reasons that motivated their reentry were found to be (in descending order of frequency) parents' expectations, career considerations, wishing to contribute to the home country, feeling isolated in the foreign country, and lifestyle preference. The average overall satisfaction with overseas experience was 4.03. The average perceived change of home society/ environment was 3.12. The average perceived treatment by home people was 3.61. All three variables were based on a 5-point scale– with 1 indicating low satisfaction, little societal change, or poor treatment by home people; and 5 indicating high satisfaction, much societal change, or positive treatment by home people.

For the dependent variables, the average score of reentry difficulty for the entire participant group was 57.65 (between the possible range of 16 and 112). The average life satisfaction was 3.49 on a 7-point scale (high scores indicate high levels of satisfaction). The average depression level was 15.21. Using 16 as a cutoff, 113 participants (60%) were under the cutoff, 45 scored between 17 and 22, and 31 scored 23 and over.

Factors affecting reentry difficulty

Results indicated that all together, the ten independent variables (not including reentry reasons) accounted for 17% of the variance of reentry difficulty. Gender and willingness to return home were significant factors. Female Taiwanese returnees tended to experience greater reentry difficulty after returning from the United States than did their male counterparts, a difference of 7.04 points on the scale. Returnees who did not consider returning home after overseas study as their first choice also experienced greater reentry difficulty (by 5.41 points) than those who considered returning home as their first choice.

Among 14 reentry reasons, eight were found to be significant. Students who returned home because of "parents' expectations" or "little job opportunity in foreign countries" tended to face greater reentry difficulty than did their counterparts. Those who returned home with reasons "more meaningful to work in Taiwan", "never thought of staying overseas", "sponsored by the government, must come home", "wish to contribute to home country", and "prefer the lifestyle in Taiwan" tended to have less reentry difficulty than did their counterparts.

Factors affecting life satisfaction

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All together, the ten independent variables accounted for 16% of the variance of life satisfaction. Significant factors were overall satisfaction with overseas experience, willingness to return home, and perceived treatment by home people. For every point of increase on the overall satisfaction with overseas experience there was a 0.28 point increase on the life satisfaction scale. For every point of increase on perceived treatment by home people there was a 0.32 point increase on the life satisfaction scale. Returnees who did not consider returning home after overseas study as their first choice tended to have lower levels of life satisfaction (by 0.63 point) than did their counterparts.

Four reentry reasons were found to be significant: more meaningful to work in Taiwan, never thought of staying overseas, good career opportunity in Taiwan, and prefer the lifestyle in Taiwan. Returnees who considered it more meaningful to work in Taiwan, good career opportunity in Taiwan, never thought of staying overseas, and prefer the lifestyle in Taiwan tended to be more satisfied with their life at home than did their counterparts.

Factors affecting psychological well-being

All together, the ten independent variables accounted for 19% of the variance of the depression level. "Perceived treatment by home people" was the only significant factor in the analysis. For every point of increase on this variable, there was a 2.16 point decrease in returnees' depression levels.

Three reentry reasons were found to significantly affect depression levels-- more meaningful to work in Taiwan, never thought of staying overseas, and sponsored by the government, must come home. When returnees were motivated to return home by these three reasons, they tended to be less depressed than their counterparts.

Correlations among dependent variables

Moderate levels of correlation existed among dependent variables. The relationship between reentry difficulty and life satisfaction was found to be negative (r= -0.40, p< .0001), and so was the relationship between life satisfaction and depression (r= -0.46, p< .0001). The relationship between depression and reentry difficulty was found to be positive (r= 0.54, p< .0001).

Discussion

Generally speaking, reentry may be problematic for Taiwanese returnees, especially under certain circumstances. As a group, returnees were experiencing some reentry difficulty and were slightly dissatisfied with their lives after reentry but rather satisfied with their overseas experiences. Although on the average, returnees' depression levels were below the cutoff, about 40% of the returnees might be possible or probable depressive cases. Female returnees tended to face greater reentry difficulty than did males. If returnees were satisfied with their overseas experiences, they were likely to be satisfied with their lives after reentry. If returning home after reentry was their first choice, returnees tended to experience less reentry difficulty and greater life satisfaction than did their counterparts. The better returnees perceived themselves being treated by their home people, the more satisfied they were with their lives after reentry, and the less they felt depressed. Among the 14 reentry reasons, nine were found to affect returnees' reentry: parents' expectations, little job opportunity in foreign countries, wish to establish own career in Taiwan, more meaningful to work in Taiwan, never thought of staying overseas,

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sponsored by the government/company--must come back, good career opportunity in Taiwan, wish to contribute to home country, and prefer the lifestyle in Taiwan.

These finding have significant implications especially for multicultural counseling and counselor training. Counselors in the United States and in Taiwan can provide students/returnees pre-departure and reentry orientation for both general and specific readjustment concerns. Assistance may include reality checks, helping re-familiarize returnees with social conditions in Taiwan, developing appropriate job-search skills, interpersonal skills, and coping strategies. This study could also provide some general guidelines to counselors who are and/or will be working with international students and returned students. Counselors can help increase students' awareness of cultural reentry and help students examine the potential impact of their motivation for reentry on their readjustment process. As for educators or trainers in the multicultural counseling profession, it is hoped that this study will call attention to the inclusion of reentry adjustment in the entire cross-cultural adaptation process, and will prepare student counselors to provide services to clients regarding both their initial cross-cultural adaptation as well as their reentry transition.

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